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SUBJECT: [REDACTED] COUNTRY COMMENTARY: ATTITUDE OF THE
SALVADORAN ARMED FORCES ON THE JESUIT CASE

SUBJECT: COUNTRY COMMENTARY - ASSESSMENT OF SALVADORAN JOINT
GENERAL STAFF'S ATTITUDES TOWARD THE JESUIT MURDER
INVESTIGATION

1. IN A LETTER TO THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE DATED 22
FEBRUARY 1991, THE SALVADORAN ARMED FORCES JOINT GENERAL STAFF
(EMCFA) REQUESTED THAT THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AMPLIFY ITS
INVESTIGATION INTO THE MURDERS OF SIX JESUIT PRIESTS AND TWO
CIVILIANS ON 16 NOVEMBER 1989. IN THE LETTER, THE EMCFA

Approved for Release

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SUGGESTED THAT THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE, THROUGH THE SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE UNIT (SIU), INVESTIGATE A MEETING WHICH OCCURRED AT THE MILITARY SCHOOL ON THE EVENING OF 15 NOVEMBER 1989, AND ONCE AGAIN QUESTION THE ALLEGED PARTICIPANTS OF THIS MEETING.

2. [REDACTED] CAN ONLY SPECULATE AS TO THE MOTIVE WHY, AFTER ALMOST ONE AND A HALF YEARS, THE EMCFA, AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE RENE EMILIO ((PONCE)) IN PARTICULAR, WOULD SUDDENLY SHOW CONCERN FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE JESUIT MURDERS AND THE 15 NOVEMBER 1989 MEETING AT THE MILITARY SCHOOL. SOME POSSIBLE MOTIVES INCLUDE:

A. PONCE WANTED TO INFLUENCE THE U.S. TO RELEASE THE MILITARY AID FUNDS WHICH WERE TO BECOME AVAILABLE ONE WEEK LATER.

B. THERE IS AN EFFORT BY THE EMCFA TO FURTHER CONFUSE AND DELAY THE TRIAL BY INTRODUCING A NEW LINE OF INVESTIGATION.

C. PONCE RECEIVED PRESSURE FROM PRESIDENT ALFREDO ((CRISTIANI)) AND THE GOVERNMENT OF EL SALVADOR TO BE MORE FORTHCOMING IN THE INVESTIGATION.

D. PONCE AND THE EMCFA ARE SINCERE IN THEIR DESIRE TO RESOLVE THIS CASE AND ARE JUST BEING HELPFUL.

3. IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT PONCE DID, IN FACT, TIME THIS ANNOUNCEMENT TO INFLUENCE THE U.S. CONGRESSIONAL DECISION TO RELEASE MILITARY AID. PONCE IS WELL AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE THE U.S. GOVERNMENT PLACES ON A JUST SOLUTION TO THIS CASE. HE IS ALSO ASTUTE ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND THAT, SHOULD THIS INVESTIGATION STALL OR PROVE TO BE A DEAD END, THE ESAF'S REPUTATION WILL BE FURTHER SULLIED AND COULD EFFECTIVELY KILL ANY CHANCES OF THE ESAF RECEIVING U.S. MILITARY AID IN THE FUTURE. WHILE THE TIMING OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT MAY HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY THE MILITARY AID VOTE, [REDACTED] DOUBT IT WAS A PRIMARY MOTIVATING FACTOR.

4. THE POSSIBILITY EXISTS THAT PONCE AND THE EMCFA ARE ATTEMPTING TO FURTHER DELAY THE TRIAL BY INTRODUCING NEW AVENUES OF INVESTIGATION. AN INTEGRAL PART OF THIS THEORY IS INFORMATION THAT THE EMCFA MET WITH THE OFFICERS MENTIONED IN [REDACTED] LETTER AND BRIEFED THEM ON WHAT THEIR TESTIMONY WOULD BE. [REDACTED] NO EVIDENCE TO INDICATE THAT PONCE NOR SENIOR OFFICERS IN THE EMCFA MET WITH THE OFFICERS INVOLVED TO ORDER THEM TO TESTIFY TRUTHFULLY OR OTHERWISE.

[REDACTED] THE ESAF OFFICERS CALLED TO GIVE ADDITIONAL TESTIMONY EXPRESSED SURPRISE, ANGER, AND SOME CONFUSION, WHEN CALLED TO SUBMIT TO FURTHER QUESTIONING.

[REDACTED] THERE IS NO OUTWARD INDICATION THAT THE ESAF OFFICERS WERE COACHED ON WHAT TO SAY. IF PONCE AND THE EMCFA WANTED TO DELAY THIS CASE FROM GOING TO TRIAL, THEY HAVE SUCCEEDED. THE CASE IS NOW BOGGED DOWN IN THIS NEW LINE OF INVESTIGATION WHICH HAS YET TO DEVELOP ANY DAMAGING INFORMATION OF SIGNIFICANCE. TO THE CONTRARY, AND AS REPORTED IN PREVIOUS TRAFFIC, THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT THIS NEW INVESTIGATION WILL ACTUALLY STRENGTHEN THE DEFENSE'S CASE; THERE IS NOW TESTIMONY, DEVELOPED IN THIS LATEST ROUND OF INVESTIGATION, THAT THERE WAS NO DISCUSSION OF THE JESUITS AT THE 15 NOVEMBER 1989 MEETING. THIS UNDERCUTS THE SINCE RETRACTED TESTIMONY THAT COLONEL GUILLERMO ((BENEVIDES)) ORDERED THE KILLINGS AT THIS SAME MEETING.

5. ANOTHER POSSIBLE MOTIVE FOR PONCE'S ACTIONS IS THAT PRESIDENT CRISTIANI IS PRESSURING THE ESAF TO BE MORE COOPERATIVE IN THE INVESTIGATION. THE REASONING BEHIND THIS THEORY IS THAT PONCE WOULD NOT HAVE EMBARKED ON THIS INITIATIVE ON HIS OWN; THE ESAF HAS NOT BEEN COOPERATIVE FOR THE PAST ONE AND A HALF YEARS, WHY WOULD IT COOPERATE NOW? PRESIDENT CRISTIANI IS BEING PRESSURED FROM ALL SIDES TO PROSECUTE THIS CASE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, AND THE ESAF'S UNCOOPERATIVE STANCE WOULD HAVE BEEN A LOGICAL PLACE FOR PRESIDENT CRISTIANI TO BEGIN HIS OWN PRESSURING. THIS THEORY IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE, BUT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TO DATE TO SUPPORT THIS THEORY.

6. YET ANOTHER POSSIBILITY IS THAT PONCE AND THE EMCFA ARE SINCERE IN WANTING TO RESOLVE THIS CASE, AND THIS INITIATIVE IS A DEMONSTRATION OF THIS NEW FOUND SINCERITY. THERE ARE FEW PEOPLE WHO WOULD SIGN ON TO THIS THEORY, ESPECIALLY GIVEN THE HISTORY OF THIS CASE. THERE IS PRECIOUS LITTLE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT A CHANGE OF HEART ON THE PART OF THE ESAF AND PONCE IN PARTICULAR. IN FACT, CLOSE EXAMINATION OF THIS LATEST INITIATIVE REVEALS THAT PONCE AND THE EMCFA MAY NOT HAVE BEEN PROVIDING NEW LEADS AT ALL. THE FACT IS THAT PONCE ATTENDED THE 15 NOVEMBER 1989 MEETING AND IS FULLY AWARE OF THE PROCEEDINGS. HE IS, THEREFORE, FULLY AWARE THAT TESTIMONY WOULD PROVE THAT THERE WAS NO DISCUSSION OF THE JESUITS AT ALL (AS BORNE OUT BY SUBSEQUENT EVENTS). IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT PONCE AND THE EMCFA WERE WELL AWARE OF THE OUTCOME OF THIS LINE OF INVESTIGATION BEFORE IT STARTED.

7. [REDACTED] THIS NEW INITIATIVE WILL NOT PROVIDE STARTLING NEW REVELATIONS ABOUT THE MURDER OF THE [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

JESUITS, NOR WILL IT MOVE THE CASE ANY CLOSER TO BEING RESOLVED. THIS NEW INITIATIVE HAS SERVED TO DELAY THE CASE FROM GOING TO TRIAL, MUDDIED THE ALREADY MURKY WATERS AND GENERATED BOTH HOPE AND DESPAIR THAT A JUST SOLUTION WILL BE FOUND. IT IS LOGICAL TO EXPECT THAT SUCH AN INITIATIVE FROM THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND EMCFA WOULD SIGNAL TO THE ESAF THAT PERHAPS THE HIGH COMMAND ACTUALLY WANTED THIS CASE TO BE RESOLVED. IN FACT, THE SUBJECT OF THE JESUIT MURDERS IS NOT DISCUSSED AMONG OFFICERS, PERHAPS OUT OF FEAR OF GUILT BY ASSOCIATION OR SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY WANT IT TO GO AWAY. THE UNFORTUNATE REALITY IS THAT UNTIL A WITNESS OR RELIABLE SOURCE WITH ACCESS TO SIGNIFICANT INFORMATION ON THE AUTHORS OF THIS CRIME ARE FOUND, THE CASE WILL BE STALLED. IF THE CASE GOES TO COURT UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES IT IS NOT BEYOND THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY THAT COLONEL BENEVIDES WILL BE EXONERATED AND THE OTHERS WILL RECEIVE SENTENCES COMMENSURATE WITH THEIR INVOLVEMENT.

-----TEAR LINE-----

[REDACTED]